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hardly avoid the following reflection: If the life of every individual should completely end, evidently an event much more readily imagined than the annihilation of all matter, all life would be extinct, and it could never come again. Thus we have the curious conception of life extending through a past eternity but coming to an end in the present or the finite future. I wonder whether Professor Ritter's philosophy would be satisfied with a terminated infinity. If not, is he, as an undoubting materialist, ready to accept that other weird conception, of a material essence of life, a ponderable soul, escaping from the body at death?

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ALCOHOL; ITS ACTION ON THE HUMAN ORGANISM. Report of the Central Board of the Liquor Traffic of England. Longmans, Green, & Co. 1918. Pp. xii, 133. 60 cents.

The adoption of constitutional prohibition by the United States will probably result in a more careful examination than ever before into the scientific foundations of our knowledge concerning the effects of alcoholic beverages taken in so-called small amounts. In comparatively recent years a number of surveys of the alcohol literature have been made. Frequently the authors of such summaries have revealed a partisan attitude in their choice of sources and in discussing "established results," so that perhaps no other scientific subject has suffered more from over-statement. Consequently it is important to understand something of the circumstances which prompted the preparation and publication of this book, and to note the personnel of the authors whose breadth of view is reflected in it.

By a prefatory announcement we are informed that in November, 1916, the British Central Control Board (Liquor Traffic) appointed an Advisory Committee with instructions "to consider the conditions affecting the physiological action of alcohol, and more particularly the effects on health and industrial efficiency produced by the consumption of beverages of various alcoholic strengths, with special reference to the recent Orders of the Central Control Board, and further to plan out and direct such investigations as may appear desirable with a view to obtaining more exact data on this and cognate questions." The committee appointed comprised the following personnel: Lord D'Abernon (Chairman), Chairman of the Central Control Board; Sir George Newman, Principal Medical Officer of the Board of Education; A. R. Cushny, Pharmacologist; H. H.

Dale, Biochemist; M. Greenwood, Medical Statistician; W. McDougall, Psychologist; F. W. Mott, Pathologist; C. S. Sherrington, Physiologist; and W. C. Sullivan, Psychiatrist. A volume which these well-known scientific men have jointly produced merits very careful and wide attention. This is particularly true in the present instance because the members of the Committee are specialists in just those fields which would naturally fit them to judge and write intelligently about the action of alcohol on the human organism. The report is signed by all and the statement is made that "the conclusions represent the unanimous judgment of the committee."

The Central Control Board appointed the Advisory Committee because they considered the present "knowledge on the subject of the action of alcohol is inadequate to the needs and importance of the question;" so the Committee made it their first task to compile a summary statement of this present knowledge regarding alcohol. The above-titled book is their report on this subject. It is dated December, 1917; it was first issued as a British government publication, and is a commendable attempt to answer from experimental sources the question, "What is known concerning the action of alcohol on the human body?" No new results are contributed. The authors have made it their sole object to summarize and evaluate the facts which others have already gained by controlled observation and experimentation in this field. By this preliminary clarifying of the question it is their aim to prepare the way for further research.

The introductory chapter defines the principal scientific terms (many of them physiological) needful in discussing the subject, together with several familiar words, such as "food," "drug," "poison," and "alcohol." It discusses the constituents of alcoholic beverages, classifies the ordinary food substances, and briefly explains how the human body obtains energy from ingested food for tissue repair and for storage.

The known facts regarding alcohol effects are arranged under the following chapter topics: Alcohol as a food; Mental effects of alcohol; Alcohol and the performance of muscular acts; Action of alcohol on the digestion; Action of alcohol on the respiration and on the circulation of the blood; Influence of alcohol on the body temperature; Poison action of alcohol; Alcohol and longevity. A chapter on conclusions is followed by five pages of appendix, providing much very useful data on the consumption of alcoholic beverages, general mortality from alcoholism and also among males of the chief occupational groups, percentage of absolute alcohol in various beverages, and in ordinary retail quantities. Most of the appended data are statistics

from England and Wales. The usefulness of the book is greatly augmented by an adequate index.

Our purpose in this review is not to provide a digest of facts presented, but to introduce a book that is certain to make for clear thinking on a difficult topic. The book itself is a rather brief summary of complicated results. However, technical terms have been most successfully converted into popular language, the paragraphs are short, each chapter has many sub-heads, and no one will find the presentation difficult. Throughout the pages there is a fair number of references to original experimental reports from which the facts are drawn. Of the two thousand or perhaps more titles which might be cited in this literature, the authors have chosen about fifty, mostly from among the more recent contributions. It seems an oversight that mention is not made of the larger bibliographies on the question, even though these do not include the most recent references. Aside from its clearness and directness of statement the book is to be recommended for its impartiality in presenting the facts. Moreover, "the writers have frankly admitted doubt, when the evidence appeared insufficient to establish a definite conclusion, and have further indicated with absolute sincerity the many points, some of them of great importance, regarding which no precise and scientific knowledge is available."

The preface contributed by Lord D'Abernon is of particular interest to the scientific student of this problem. Here it is mentioned as a remarkable thing that, considering the world use of alcohol and its conceded importance to social, industrial, and economic life, humanity should lack exact knowledge of its action on the human system, for the writers contend that "no authoritative scientific work gives or seeks to give the required information." Lord D'Abernon kindly shows a little consideration for the investigators who have labored in this field by discussing some of the peculiar difficulties encountered in the laboratory when using alcohol with human subjects and when attempting to interpret the experimental results. He outlines a number of topics which the Committee regard as of fundamental importance for future investigation, and states that research, under their supervision, has already begun on several of these.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Since this abstract was written, two valuable reports issued under the supervision of this committee have reached me, viz.: *Alcohol; its Absorption into and Disappearance from the Blood under Different Conditions; and The Influence of Alcohol on Manual Work and Neuro-muscular Coöordination. Special Report Series, Nos. 31 and 34*, respectively, of the British Medical Research Committee.

Needless to say, the further activity of this Committee will be awaited with great interest, not only by the public but also by the other committees, commissions, and laboratories which have in progress organized work in this field. The problem is easily large enough to occupy profitably the attention of several such groups.

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